NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

AS FORBES TRAILED THROUGH

Hiking has become recognized in recent years as an educational as well as a healthful pastime and is enjoyed by an increasing number of people who love the open. Those who are interested in history can find scores of roads and trails in central and western Pennsylvania over which to tramp, in imitation of the Indians, the early traders, and the colonial military forces. One of the earlier hiking squads was that of the John Pomroy Historical Club of the Derry Township High School, Westmoreland County, which began its tramps during 1930. The club had been organized and sponsored by the history teachers in the school, and history programs were carried out at regular intervals. Out of this practice grew the custom of visiting near-by frontier fort sites, Indian battlefields, old canal beds, and historic buildings and museums. In 1934 Derry Township purchased five modern school busses for the transportation of its students to and from high school, and it very properly named them, much after the manner of naming Pullman cars, for the five frontier forts used by the pioneers in Derry Township, Fort Wallace, Fort Barr, Fort Pomroy, Fort Elder, and Fort Sloan. These busses are now also being used to transport large groups on longer historical motor tours, when the distance is too great to hike. The itinerary of the first trip, which took place one Saturday and was participated in by thirty-five students, included the following historic points in Westmoreland County: the intersection of the Forbes Road and Four Mile Run; Pleasant Grove (Old Donegal) Presbyterian Church and cemetery; the South Pennsylvania Railroad bed near Donegal; the Indian Creek Reservoir; Ohiopyle Falls; Fort Necessity; Braddock’s grave; Jumonville’s grave; Fort Gaddis; Gist’s Plantation; and Colonel William Crawford’s monument in Connellsville.

This type of hiking has engaged the attention of an older group, who have set out to collect records, published and unpublished; sift out tradi-

1 The second part of this article will appear in a later number of this magazine. Ed.
tions; examine the scars that remain; and walk the Indian trails and the military roads of Pennsylvania west of the Susquehanna River. The plan is to traverse these routes in series of short hikes on Saturdays, whenever the weather permits. The initial hike, over the old Forbes Road, began on October 19, 1935, with a meeting in the quaint colonial court room of the courthouse at Bedford, the real starting point of that historic road. The attainment of the greatest possible degree of historical accuracy was one of the aims of the group, and a connected draft of all the lands patented between Fort Bedford and Fort Pitt was first made from the surveys and applications filed with the Pennsylvania Provincial Council after the purchases of land from the Indians in 1754 and 1768. While most of the patents were taken out after Bedford County was erected out of Cumberland in 1771, and Westmoreland County out of Bedford in 1773, in many instances the surveys and the applications for the warrants show the location of the Forbes Road. In some cases there is a hiatus, to be sure, but the lines can be pretty accurately laid down with the aid of the scars that remain on the ground. Court records in the four western counties along the trail, Bedford, Somerset, Westmoreland, and Allegheny, were resorted to by the historical hikers, and copies of the United States geological survey quadrangles aided in determining grades. One of the outstanding characteristics of the Forbes Road was its traversing of dividing ridges of the Allegheny Mountains. At one point along the way the present-day hiker may view the waters of the Juniata and the Kiskiminetas rivers, at another the waters of the Loyalhanna and Mill creeks, at a third the waters of Crabtree Run and Sewickley Creek, and at a fourth those of the Allegheny River and Turtle Creek. Some markers now erected at points alleged to be on the road are not on the famed military highway at all, for a number of the earlier historians, although they may have been well meaning in their endeavors, were ill informed. To check up on all these matters and seek the correct road was one of the inducements of the hike.

"Provincial Hikers" was the name adopted by the group as it gathered for the first trek. Captain Edward J. Braden of Bradenville was selected as the titular head because of his age, eighty-four years, and his keen interest in history. He is a part of the history of the old Pennsylvania canals, for
he ran boats on the Beaver and Lake Erie Canal, via Hartstown, before the days of railroads in that section. Captain Braden is a second cousin of General John J. Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Forces in the World War, and both are descendants of Frederick Pershing, early Westmoreland frontier ranger. Moving and still picture operations were allotted to Dr. David W. Rial, vice principal of Frick Training School, Pittsburgh. Colonel William J. Laughner was placed in charge of traditions, family letters, and the gathering of data along the way. John M. Deeds, a sergeant in Company M, 110th Infantry, during the World War, was made official ranger in charge of the trail, and the writer supervised the state and county records, maps, and surveys.

After the visit to the Bedford County Courthouse, the hikers really began their tour two blocks away at the site of the Raystown encampment. The site is now occupied by business buildings. Two well-worded markers are to be observed on either side of the Lincoln Highway through Bedford: one was erected by the Pennsylvania Historical Commission to indicate the location of the depot of supplies at Fort Bedford and the starting point of the Forbes expedition; the other was provided by the Bedford chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution to mark the building used by President George Washington as his headquarters on October 19 and 20, 1794, when he was in Bedford in charge of the United States army, which was en route to quell the Whiskey Insurrection in western Pennsylvania.

The Forbes Road follows pretty generally the present line of the Lincoln Highway westwardly to Wolfsburg, which is close to an Indian village referred to as Old Town at the time of the cutting through of the James Burd road in 1755. The old covered bridge, the quaint mill latterly operated by Dr. Cofelt, and the old tavern building now occupied by John A. Henderson were of absorbing interest as relics of a time later than the Forbes expedition. The traditions about Wolfsburg seem to confirm early maps that show that the routes of the Indian trail and of Burd’s road were on slightly different lines. Captain Robert Callender, who was in command of the Seventh Company of the First Battalion, Pennsylvania provincials, like many other officers who came through with Forbes, re-
turned in later years and secured a patent for over six hundred acres of land, one side of which extended along the base of Wills Mountain, according to land records in the Pennsylvania department of internal affairs. His land included the William Todd mansion on the present Lincoln Highway to the northward, and it is easy to believe, because the Lincoln Highway is there, that the Forbes Road also went there. The best research and examination of the trails about Wolfsburg indicate that the old Traders' Path utilized by the advance battlelions of Forbes extended a short distance up the easterly bank of the Raystown Branch of the Juniata River, then crossed over this stream, and, as a pronounced scar through the farm of Samuel Stuckey reveals, extended to the forks, where Forbes's soldiers left the Burd road and cut their way over Tull's Hill to the Shawnee Cabins. Many of the early traders and scouts estimated the distance from Raystown to Shawnee Cabins as eight miles.

John Harris, in his account of the road to Logstown in 1754, gives the distance from Raystown to Shawnee Cabins as eight miles; and James Dunning, the guide who served with Major George Armstrong, gives the following estimates, which Major Armstrong considered "pretty true": From Raystown to water (Old Town), three miles; to Smith's Run, two miles; to Nelson's, four miles; to Dunning's Sleeping Place, three miles; and to the foot of Allegheny Hill, three miles. The site of Shawnee Cabins is thus named by Dunning as "Nelson's," and it is easily located at a spot along the stream, for Thomas Nelson made his application on July 1, 1762, for two hundred acres of land, "including an improvement made by his father, Joseph Nelson, at a place called Shawanese Cabins on the Great Road about eight miles Westward from Bedford in the County of Cumberland."

It was easy to visualize the movement of the Forbes expedition up the valley between the waters of Kegg's Run and Shawnee Cabins Creek, past the Hillegas School in Juniata Township. The teacher and pupils of this school, who were at recess as the hikers trailed along, had not previously known that the illustrious George Washington had led his Virgini-
ans within fifty feet of their schoolhouse, but they were quick to answer questions about Lexington and Ticonderoga. A good grade led up the valley to the foot of the Allegheny Mountains, which were in their fall colors on the sunny Armistice Day when the party of twenty-one historical enthusiasts climbed the trail. The Indian Traders' Path led up the souterly spur of the mountain below Grandview; the Forbes engineers cut the military road up the gap to the northwest, close to what is called the “Shot Tower.” Captain Harry Gordon, engineer of both the Braddock and Forbes expeditions, planned this route, and Ensign Harry Rohr cut the road through. After the cutting Sir John St. Clair wrote to Colonel Henry Bouquet at Raystown on August 12, 1758, and designated it as “diabolical” and “immense.” Captain Allen MacLean had been left at Shawnee Cabins to build a redoubt, and Sir John St. Clair summoned him to the top of the Allegheny Mountain to build Fort Duart, the remains of which compose one of the best scars of the whole itinerary.

The Armistice Day hike ended at Fort Duart on a beautiful fall evening, and the succeeding one began in a snow flurry a week later. It was strenuous trailing for the first two miles towards Fields's encampment, but the sun came out and a fine view was afforded down Shade Creek some twenty-five miles to the Sang Hollow Gap, west of Johnstown. Colonel Bouquet, after admiring this view, wrote to General Forbes on August 20, 1758: “Yesterday I went to reconnoiter this terrible mountain . . . in mounting upon the second height which is nothing at all, I observed as far as the sight can reach and saw distinctly the whole course of Laurel Hill. There is a large gap, bearing N. by W. of us, about 20 miles N. of our Road, which cuts the mountain from top to bottom, and I am told it is the passage of the Kiskiminetas. I requested Sir John to have it reconnoitred to see if there is an Indian Path.”

The scars of the road, plainly visible with the aid of the snow and the absence of leaves, led through Fields’s encampment, one-half mile north of the present Reel’s Corners, then through the “Shades of Death,” and over the hills to Edmund’s Swamp. At that point, near the farmstead of

4 The letter is in the Bouquet Papers in the British Museum, Additional Manuscripts, 21840: 147. The Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania has a transcript.
A. Park Lohr, was the famous trading post of Edmund Cartlidge, one of the earliest traders to go through to the Allegheny River. After climbing the hill the trail leads down the higher ground three miles to the site of Fort Belle Air, on Oven Run. Here John C. Cassiday, a teacher in the schools of Shade Township, Somerset County, pointed out the remains of the oven, used by the Forbes army bakers, for which the stream was named. Three miles farther along the hikers came to Stony Creek, where the fort of that name was later erected and strengthened. There were no rumblings of the terrific quarrel that Colonel John St. Clair and Major Adam Stephens engaged in, but it was plainly evident that Ensign Harry Rohr was the real factor in engineering the road there. The trail northwestward up the hill above Stoyestown took the hikers, after the three-mile tramp, to the Quemahoning Dam. The hike for that day ended at the easterly side of that beautiful body of water, five miles long, and the tourists could but visualize the site of old Chief Kickenapawling’s Indian Town, as it was located on land now covered by the water above the dam in Quemahoning Creek. Some beautiful moving and panoramic pictures were taken there.

The next hike began on the western bank of Quemahoning Creek, proceeded by a gentle grade through a beautiful second growth of hemlock, and rounded the hill above the orchard on the farm of the late David Berkey. On the eminence the hikers got a fine view to the eastward as far as the second rising of the Allegheny Mountains at Rohr’s Gap and Fort Duart, where the hike had ended on Armistice Day. To the westward there was a clear view of the new Lincoln Highway ascending the eastern slope of Laurel Hill; to the north of it was the gap that leads up from Fort Dudgeon to Ligonier. West of this point the hikers passed through the old village of Pilltown, where was located the famous spring of Major George Armstrong on the old Forbes Road. After crossing Roaring Run the trail went westward over fairly level land, historically known as the Clearfields, and thence to Fort Dudgeon.

Fort Dudgeon was on the old Traders’ Path, but was not used very long, for Captain Shelby was given instructions to lay out a road from Fort Stony Creek to Laurel Hill, which he designated as “four miles
shorter and eight miles better” than the difficult way through the Shades of Death and across Edmund’s Swamp. It was on this new Shelby road that the later Tomahawk Camp was located, at which General Forbes, on the return trip, nearly died because his “chimney” had not been clayed. The hikers examined the sites of both Fort Dudgeon and Tomahawk Camp, the latter near the picturesque old Kline’s mill, before proceeding up the eastern slope of Laurel Hill. Up to that point the motor cars could be relayed along fairly good roads, but on the day the group tramped over Laurel Hill to Irwin’s Block House all cars were parked at Kline’s mill and gone after by the drivers in the evening. The trail was nicely scarred over Laurel Hill and down into Ligonier, although at many places it passed through a second growth of timber and across fields. At Ligonier the records obtained from the land office at Harrisburg were fitted neatly together and showed that the marking of the road conformed to the physical character of the high ground between the streams. Two Mile Spring on the Singer farm is a landmark two miles east of the “Camp at Loyal Hannon,” and the road keeps the high ground from that point into Ligonier. The cutting of the first fifty miles of the road severely tested the ability, patience, and endurance of the motley army that General Forbes commanded. It was also the training ground on which the army acquired its ability to cut the road so much more quickly over the second fifty miles west of the Loyalhannon encampment.

Eight days of hiking were consumed in reaching Two Mile Run, which is two miles westerly from Ligonier, and a total distance of fifty-two miles was covered in that time. There was considerable cross-hiking between Bedford and the beautiful Schellsburg farmstead of Chancellor John G. Bowman of the University of Pittsburgh because of two erroneously placed markers of the Historical Commission of Pennsylvania, and the hikers added four extra miles on the old road by Quemahoning Dam. The average day’s hiking was eight miles, although there were but fifty-two miles of direct distance.

The hikes permitted of many fall and winter nature studies of both plants and game. The study of the topography of the trail was fascinating, as was the evidence of engineering that, considering the wooded and
rocky areas through which the Forbes army passed, was well ordered and skillful. The companionship of the hikers, whether the days were sunshiny or blustery, was delightful. The first fifty miles of hiking ended in a March thundershower, but an oyster supper at beautiful Ligonier and the showing, in the American Legion Hall, of moving pictures and slides of views along the eastern portion of the road compensated fully for the slight inclemency of the weather.

Greensburg, Pennsylvania

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